

# Glossary

**AIDS**— Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

**ANTIBODIES**— A protein produced by the body's immune system that recognizes and fights infectious organisms and other foreign substances that enter the body. Each antibody is specific to a particular piece of an infectious organism or other foreign substance.

**ANTIRETROVIRAL THERAPY (ART)** — ART refers to any of a range of treatments that include antiretroviral medications. The drugs that are used in the treatment of HIV, a retrovirus, are designed to interfere with the virus' ability to replicate itself and, therefore, slow the progression of the disease.

**CHLAMYDIA**— Chlamydia, the most common sexually transmitted infection in Canada, is a bacterial infection caused by *Chlamydia trachomatis*. Symptoms may include genital discharge and painful or difficulty urinating. However, more than 50% of infected males and 70% of infected females have no symptoms and are unaware of their condition, making diagnosis and treatment of chlamydia difficult.<sup>19,20</sup>

**CONTACT**— A person's contacts are based on their activities, however Public Health staff typically asks for all sexual contacts, needle sharing contacts and vertical transmission contacts, depending on the diagnosis and situation.

**CO-INFECTION**— Having two infections at the same time. For example, a person infected with both human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and tuberculosis (TB) has a co-infection.

**CRUDE RATE**— The rate of a disease or health condition in a population expressed as a number per 100,000. Crude rates were not adjusted to reflect the age distribution effects for the Region of Peel's population.

**EXPOSURE CATEGORY**— Exposure category refers to the most likely way a person became infected with HIV.

**GONORRHEA**— Gonorrhea is a bacterial infection caused by *Neisseria gonorrhoea*. Gonorrhea is very similar to chlamydia in that it presents with symptoms of urinary pain and genital discharge. If left untreated, gonorrhea and chlamydia can have long-term complications such as chronic infection, infertility and tubal pregnancy. Like chlamydia, gonorrhea can be asymptomatic and go undiagnosed.<sup>19,21,22</sup>

**HEPATITIS C**— Hepatitis C is a viral infection of the liver. The symptoms of hepatitis include loss of appetite, nausea, tiredness and jaundice. Complications of hepatitis C include cirrhosis (liver scarring), liver cancer and liver failure. In Ontario, reporting of hepatitis C became mandatory in 1995. In Canada, injection drug use is the primary risk factor for acquisition of hepatitis C.<sup>19,23,24</sup>

**HIERARCHY**— The ordering of risk factors by the most likely cause of HIV-infection. An individual may report more than one risk factor, however only one is reported as the main risk factor which carries the highest risk of HIV transmission. The only instance when two risk factors are listed together are men having sex with men (MSM) and injection drug user (IDU) or MSM-IDU.

**MSM**— Men who reported having sex with men.

**MSM-IDU**— Men who report having sex with men and who also inject drugs.

**IDU**— A person who injects drugs is called an injection drug user.

**MOTHER-TO-CHILD TRANSMISSION**— Also referred to as “vertical transmission,” is the transmission of HIV from an HIV-infected mother to her child either during pregnancy, during labour, at birth or after birth through breastfeeding.

**BLOOD PRODUCT RECIPIENT**— This category from iPHIS includes those who have received blood, blood products or clotting factor. This exposure category or risk factor was separated in RDIS as those who received blood products before 1985 or after 1985. In iPHIS there is no distinction made with respect to date of transmission.

**HIV-ENDEMIC COUNTRY**— Endemic refers to the constant presence of a disease or infectious agent within a given geographic area or population group. It may also refer to a disease that is usually present at a relatively high prevalence and incidence rate in comparison with other areas or populations. In terms of HIV/AIDS surveillance, HIV-endemic may be used to refer to a country where the principal way people become infected with HIV is through heterosexual contact.

**HETEROSEXUAL TRANSMISSION**— A person could report either high-risk heterosexual contact which is with another person of the opposite sex who is either HIV-infected or who is at an increased risk for HIV infection. A person at an increased risk for HIV infection would include someone who is an injection drug user, an MSM partner, a person born in a country in which the predominant means of HIV transmission is heterosexual contact, a person who has received blood or blood products, or a person with suspected HIV infection or AIDS. A person could also report heterosexual contact with another person but does not report on the HIV-related risk factors associated with their partner (or partner’s risk factors are unknown). Also included in this category is a person who reports heterosexual contact without any information about their partner and reported that they did not use a condom.

**OTHER RISK FACTOR**— Used to classify cases in which the mode of HIV transmission is known but cannot be classified into any of the major exposure categories listed (example: non-medical non-occupational exposures such as acupuncture, tattoo, body piercing, occupational exposure to potentially HIV contaminated blood or body fluids, or intra-nasal non-prescription drug use).

**NO IDENTIFIABLE RISK (NIR)**—Used to classify those who reported a risk factor which is not considered specific to HIV infection such as: travel outside province or country (country not specified); pregnant, abnormal chest x-ray, low income, or where NIR is listed as a risk factor.

**UNKNOWN RISK FACTOR**—Used to classify those persons with a missing history of exposure to HIV (i.e. left blank) or where the risk factor is specified as “unknown”. There are several reasons as to why this occurs such as the person has died with an incomplete risk factor history; the person has been lost to follow up: the person declines to be interviewed or to report a risk factor or the person cannot identify a risk factor.

**HIV**—Human Immunodeficiency Virus

**IMMUNE SYSTEM**—The body’s system of defence against foreign organisms such as bacteria, viruses or fungi.

**iPHIS**—Integrated Public Health Information System. A data collection system for reportable diseases first used in Ontario in 2005 (replacing RDIS - see below).

**INCIDENCE**—A measure of the number of new cases of illness occurring in a population over a period of time (e.g. one year). The denominator is the population at risk; the numerator is the number of new cases occurring during a given time period.

**OPPORTUNISTIC INFECTIONS**—Diseases that rarely occur in healthy people but cause infections in individuals whose immune systems are compromised, such as in HIV infection. These organisms are frequently present in the body but are generally kept under control by a healthy immune system. When a person infected with HIV develops an opportunistic infection, they are considered to have progressed to an AIDS diagnosis.

**PREVALENCE**—The total number of people with a specific disease or health condition living in a defined population at a particular time. HIV prevalence is the total number of people living with HIV infection (including those with AIDS) in Canada at a particular time.

**RDIS**—Reportable Disease Information System. This database was used in Ontario between 1990 and 2004 (and part of 2005). See Data Methods Section for more information.

**RISK FACTORS**—A risk factor is an aspect of someone’s behaviour or lifestyle, a characteristic that a person was born with, or an event that he or she has been exposed to that is known to be associated with a health-related condition.

**REPORTABLE**—Communicable or infectious diseases (including those contained in this report) are reportable to the local Medical Officer of Health under the jurisdiction of the Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA). Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) became reportable in Ontario in 2002. Prior to this only Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) cases were reportable.

**SYPHILIS**—Syphilis is a complex sexually transmitted infection caused by the bacteria *Treponema pallidum*. Syphilis moves through five stages if left untreated and is infectious mostly during the early stages (typically less than one year after becoming infected). However, it is during the later stages of the disease that syphilis can do the most damage to the body, affecting the brain, blood vessels, the heart and bones. It can eventually lead to death. Similar to chlamydia and gonorrhea, syphilis can be asymptomatic and go undiagnosed.<sup>19</sup>

**TUBERCULOSIS**—Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by bacteria called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. It mainly affects the lungs but can affect other parts of the body as well. Tuberculosis is spread through the air from person-to-person when someone with infectious or active TB disease in their lungs or larynx coughs or sneezes. Even though TB is completely curable with antibiotics, it continues to be a major health problem and is a leading cause of death for people infected with HIV worldwide.<sup>13</sup>